

## Forest Hill Community Area

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### Community Character

The Forest Hill Community Area is unique in that while the majority of the land area is located in the rural part of the County, the southernmost portion is located within the Development Envelope. The community area encompasses that section of Harford County from Deer Creek south to MD Route 23, from Sharon/Sharon Acres Roads to the west, and U.S. Route 1 to the east. The heritage of this area is that of dairy farming operations and small communities including Chestnut Hill, Ferncliff, Hickory, Sandy Hook, Rocks, and Gibson which are situated among the rolling Piedmont hills of Bynum Run, Winters Run, and the Deer Creek tributaries of Cabbage Run, Stout Bottle Branch, and South Stirrup Run. The largest concentration of homes and businesses within the community area may be found in and around the Village of Forest Hill. True to its name, Forest Hill is located on the high ground of the drainage divide between Winters Run, Deer Creek, and Bynum Run which is just outside the northernmost boundary of the Development Envelope.

In “Our Harford Heritage”, C. Milton Wright describes Forest Hill as containing the usual places of business as of 1858. Although there is no record of the date of origin of the name, it is known that the village was called Forest Hill for many years before 1858. At that time, and in later years, the village contained a private school which was then converted to a public school, an Odd Fellows Hall, and a Friends (Quaker) Meeting House.

In the 1880's, construction of the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad made Forest Hill a chief milk shipping center; the railroad also served as a commuter line to countless passengers. In addition to the station in Forest Hill, the railroad stopped at Ferncliff, Sharon, and Rocks. As many of the rural industries declined, and competition with good roads, trucks, and automobiles became too great, the railroad ceased operation in 1959.

In the mid-1990's, Harford County Government, in conjunction with the newly formed Foundation for the Preservation of the Ma and Pa Railroad, began planning for a seven mile trail along the bed of the railroad in the Bel Air/Forest Hill area. The Ma and Pa Heritage Trail follows the alignment of the historic Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad from Vale to Forest Hill.

Phase I of the trail, which is approximately two miles in length, was completed in 1999. It extends from Tollgate Road, near the Parks and Recreation headquarters, to Main Street in Bel Air. Phase II is 1.75 miles in length and was completed in 2000 and extends from the new Blake's Venture Park on Melrose Lane, near the intersection with Bynum Road, to Friends Park in Forest Hill.

Hickory is also located within the community area; it was presumably named after the dominant tree species within the area. Early accounts maintain that Hickory contained a post office as well as St. Ignatius Church, which dates from 1793. According to Wright, the village also contained a tavern, which was the terminus for a stagecoach line that ran between Hickory and Magnolia for the first half of the 19th century.

Most notably, Hickory was also the location of the first consolidated school for black students in Harford County. Built in 1951, the school contained facilities for elementary and high school students who traveled from all over the County to attend. Though now integrated, the facility is still in use within the Harford County School System as an elementary school. Students in the Forest Hill Area attend one of four elementary schools – Forest Hill, Hickory, North Bend or North Harford. Middle school students attend Southampton, and high school students attend either C. Milton Wright or North Harford. Based on the October 2003 amendment to the Annual Growth Report, these schools are operating below the APF standard for capacity. The Bel Air Volunteer Fire Company provides fire and emergency services to the community.

As the seat of government for Harford County, the Town of Bel Air has historically been a focal point for new growth, particularly within the past decade. As a result, growth has gradually crept north of Bel Air as new residential areas were developed and commercial markets soon followed. With the construction of the Hickory Bypass and extension of MD Route 23, access was improved to the rural areas north and west of Bel Air.

Travel from the rural area to Bel Air along MD Routes 24 and 23 resulted in much of the land adjacent to MD Route 24, and south of Jarrettsville Road, being developed into commercial and retail uses that captured business from the rural area. Combined with development in Bel Air, Forest Hill and Hickory now serve as transition areas to the rural area.

While agricultural land use has given way to suburban residential and commercial interests, Forest Hill and Hickory still serve as gateways to the rural area. Even with development pressure directly south of the village, Forest Hill is still an excellent example of the rural lifestyle in terms of culture and architecture.

Located at a crossroads, the village is a significant employment center with the Forest Hill Industrial Airpark and the Forest Hill Business Center located in, or adjacent to, the village. Forest Hill remains home to an elementary school, an original Maryland and Pennsylvania station, and Friends Park, which is named for the Friends Meeting House that once stood within the village. Additionally, the village contains a variety of small-scale commercial uses and historic homes.

Over time, Hickory has grown away from the crossroads at MD Route 543 and U. S. Route 1 and has become quite diverse in terms of content. The Hickory area also serves as an employment center with a diversity of uses including farm equipment sales, restaurants, auto sales, equipment repair, and veterinary services to name a few. The Hickory Village Shopping Center has been redeveloped to include a new restaurant, fast food franchise and space for a new supermarket. The village also contains a transportation facility for the Board of Education, and has become more of an employment center with the development of the Wyndemede Corporate Center. Hickory is also home to numerous residents, and will continue to grow as several new neighborhoods are planned.

Road improvements, such as the Hickory Bypass, have been constructed to reduce traffic flow through the villages and accommodate truck traffic from the Forest Hill Industrial Airpark, the Forest Hill Business Center, and the Wyndemede Corporate Center. The intersection of MD Route 23 and the Hickory Bypass has become a community focal point with the new Greater Harford Industrial Center, Wade R. Tucker II memorial football fields, restaurants and small shopping center.

The Forest Hill area had a 2000 population of 5,122, which is 2.3% of the County's population (Figure 56). Between 1990 and 2000, the population of the area increased by 55.2%. While the number of persons between the ages of 20 - 34 living in the Forest Hill area increased modestly by 14.5% (from 743 to 851), all other age groups grew more dramatically in size. The age group between 10 - 14 years showed the highest population growth with an 87% increase (235 to 440). During the same period, the number of households increased by 53.2% - from 1,140 to 1,746.

### **Forest Hill Demographic Profile: 1990 - 2000**

	1990	2000	Percent Change
Total Population	3,301	5,122	55.17%
Total Households	1,140	1,746	53.16%
<b>Median Household Income (in current \$)</b>	<b>\$41,818</b>	<b>\$67,840</b>	<b>62.23%</b>
Employment	961	3,683	283.25%
<b>Population By Race / Hispanic Origin</b>			
White	3,215	4,921	53.06%
Black	74	146	97.30%
American Indian/Alaska Native	5	11	120.00%
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	6	18	200.00%
Other	1	2	100.00%
Population of 2 or more Races	NA	24	NA
Hispanic Population	18	45	150.00%

Figure 56

Throughout the County, household income is up 37%. The median household income for this area grew 62% in the last decade from \$41,818 to \$67,840. Households in this community earning over \$100,000 a year increased by 1011%, while households earning less than \$35,000 a year decreased by 28%. Total employment in this area increased by 283% from 961 to 3,683.

### **Plan for the Area**

The strength of the Forest Hill Community Area will continue to be based on the balance between rural and suburban land uses. For much of the area, farming will continue as the principal land use and economic force. Commercial and suburban residential growth will continue in the area between the Town of Bel Air and the areas south and east of Forest Hill, and south, east, and west of Hickory. Growth in these areas will continue to diminish the distinction between the Town, village of Forest Hill and Hickory as separate entities. Consequently, the plan for the area maintains the demarcation line between the more suburban areas in the southernmost portion of the community area and the farming operations and villages in order to provide diversity and balance between land use intensities.

The rural village of Forest Hill and the community of Hickory will serve as gateways to the rural area, providing a transition between uses within the Development Envelope and uses within the rural area. Because there is sufficient capacity within the Development Envelope to address development

needs for the life of this Plan, the Development Envelope will not be expanded in this community area. The Development Envelope shall remain south of Jarrettsville Road to reduce development pressure on Forest Hill, and the Development Envelope shall not be extended west of MD Route 24.

The Forest Hill village boundary will also remain unchanged. Any new development adjacent to the village must be of a low-intensity nature and of a design compatible to the village in terms of density, pedestrian orientation, scale, road design, and architecture. A Village Study has been scheduled for the Forest Hill village. The Study will entail the careful inventory of architectural characteristics, site design and Village Business characteristics.

The Rural Residential area will continue as a transition area between the more intensive developments north of Bel Air to the rural, predominantly agricultural area north of Forest Hill. The boundaries of the Rural Residential area will not be expanded. With regard to the Hickory area, existing boundaries of the Development Envelope shall remain intact, bounded by existing Rural Residential area.

Maintaining the boundaries of the Development Envelope will serve to protect the integrity of the villages as destinations rather than extensions of suburban growth, and it will help to reduce traffic through the village centers. Additionally, studies indicate that there is adequate commercially zoned land to meet the immediate and foreseeable retail and service needs of the County. No additional commercial zoning will be supported within the Forest Hill Community Area unless further analysis determines that there is a need for additional commercial land. Any additional zoning changes will also be subject to a technical analysis to ensure that the proposed change will not generate adverse impacts to the community.

The Rural Village of Forest Hill shall be planned for new growth and redevelopment to help protect and promote the viability of the agricultural area. Growth shall be compatible with, and of a quantity appropriate to, the existing character of the village specifically in terms of road design, scale, and architecture. The historic aspects of the Forest Hill rural village shall be evaluated, and design guidelines should be developed that will help to protect the historic integrity of the area. Major commercial uses shall be directed toward Bel Air.

Economic development programs and policies shall be developed that promote existing businesses serving the agricultural industry, and that give priority to new agricultural businesses within Forest Hill and Hickory. These shall be designed to promote redevelopment in older areas, and adaptive reuse of historic structures within the area.

Public facilities should be provided on a community need basis and should be located within village centers for rural areas, and within Community and Neighborhood Centers within the Development Envelope. The Department of Parks and Recreation is in the process of planning the 30-acre Prospect Mill Park to help address the active open space needs of the Hickory/Fountain Green area.

Additionally, the community area currently contains farming operations participating in agricultural preservation programs. There are over 2,000 acres of preserved agricultural land in the area. The Forest Hill Community Area also falls into the expansion area for the Lower Deer Creek Rural

Legacy area. Landowner interest should be identified for future agricultural preservation efforts with emphasis on farms between existing blocks of protected land.

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## Forest Hill Community Area

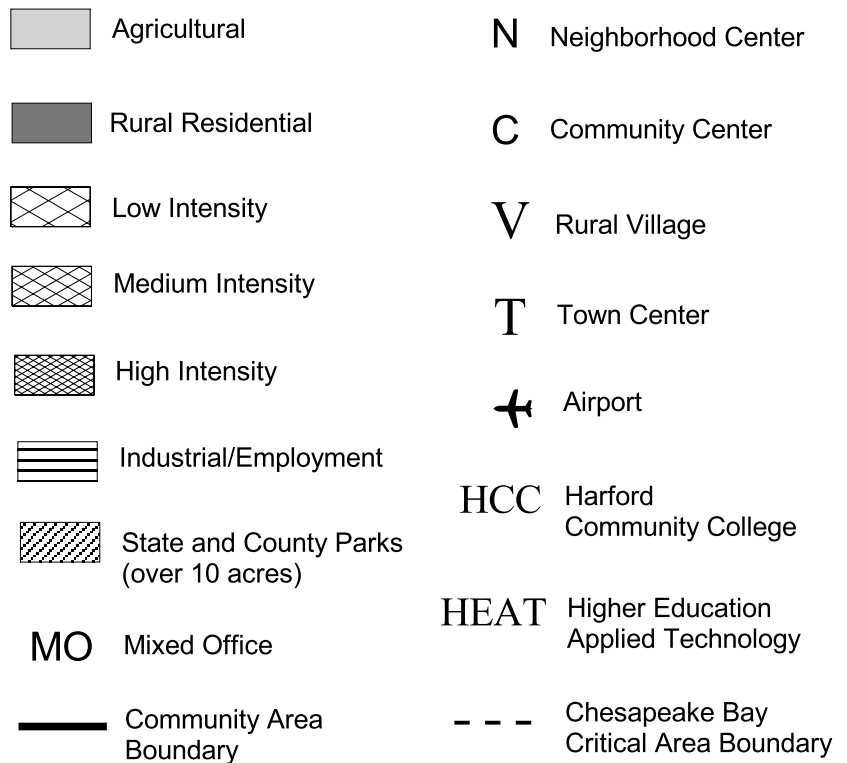
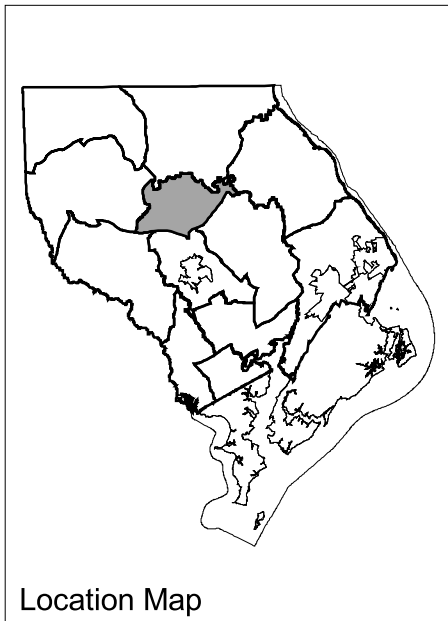


Figure 57

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